



WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Monday, August 30, 2004, for the purpose of discussing a plan to develop the former nursing home site on Greenbelt Road.

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m. It was held in the Council Room of the Municipal Building.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Leta M. Mach, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts, and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Terri Hruby, Assistant Director, Planning and Community Development; David E. Moran, Assistant City Manager; and Kathleen Gallagher, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Lowell Baier, Baier Properties; Steve Varga, Enterprise Realty Services; Tom Haller, Gibbs and Haller; Steve Gang, Lessard Architectural Group; Sheldon Goldberg, Advisory Planning Board; and Thomas X. White, Greenbelt News Review.

Mayor Davis opened the meeting by remarking that the City had “conflicted issues” regarding the development of this site, since the loss of the nursing home was a significant one.

Text Amendment Issues

Ms. Hruby reviewed the plan for 90 “luxury” condominium units. She said Mr. Baier had requested the meeting primarily to seek the City’s cooperation on a text amendment to the county zoning ordinance that would be needed for this development, since the property is R-18, which is more oriented toward rental units than condos. There would not be a need to change the permitted use, since condos are already allowed. Rather, they are seeking an exemption to the formulas for the number of bedrooms per unit in the complex; building height; and percentage of lot coverage.

Regarding the bedrooms, she said the exemption would permit a larger proportion of two-bedroom to one-bedroom units than the ordinance allows and that City planning staff concurs that this exemption would enable a higher-quality and more market-appropriate product.

Regarding building height, she said the ordinance requires buildings on properties five acres or less to be limited to 40’; properties of more than five acres may have buildings of up to 80’ high. The developers want to go beyond 40’ not to increase the number of units but to build units with higher ceilings. The amendment would allow buildings of up to 80’ if the lot is larger than five acres or if the building has four or more stories and an elevator. Ms. Hruby said staff thought it would be more acceptable to reduce the lot

size requirement to four acres than to tie the height to the number of stories or presence of an elevator. The site in question is about 4.5 acres.

Regarding the third change, lot coverage, the proposed legislation would permit an increase in allowed coverage from 30% to 35% in R-18. Although the developer is currently planning about 31% coverage for this site, that could change. Ms. Hruby said staff objects to changing the ordinance on this criterion because, in any given instance, increasing coverage could be detrimental to the environment without producing higher-quality development. She said staff would prefer to see this handled by variance, although in this case, because a detailed site plan is on file for the nursing home, the variance authority would reside with the county, not the City.

A question was raised about why the amendment was drafted to allow up to 80' in certain circumstances although the developers wanted to go only to 50-55' for this project. Mr. Haller said that was only because the two existing categories are 40' and 80' and they had not wished to introduce a new category in their text amendment.

Mayor Davis asked what the coverage of the existing nursing home is. Mr. Haller said 47%; he added that nursing homes are permitted up to 60% lot coverage. He explained that the issue here partly has to do with an unaccounted-for 10% of lot size in the legislation. He said currently the legislation limits coverage to 30% and prescribes 60% open space but is silent on the remaining 10%. He said they wish to extend into the 10%, not lessen the open space requirement.

Other Questions

Moving from the text amendment issues to specific items, Mr. Roberts asked why, if they were going to cover less of the lot, they had to reduce the tree buffer, as apparently was the case from their illustrations. Mr. Gang said he thought the reason was that their development was more spread out and had additional open space in internal spaces such as courtyards, rather than having all the space on the periphery. He said they could certainly look at this again and see if the structure could be somewhat realigned to maximize the buffer.

Regarding parking spaces to be provided, Mr. Haller said the number could be limited to 2.5 per unit because of the proximity to Metro. He said they would prefer two, which the City could authorize by variance. Council expressed concern that this would not be adequate, especially if, as is the wont of condos, the percentage of renters increased over the years. It was noted that there is no street parking available for spillover.

In response to Mr. Herling's question, Mr. Baier said the anticipated price of the units would be in the mid-\$200,000 range. The Mayor asked about amenities. Mr. Baier said the project was too small to support much. He said they did intend to build to allow for disability access, and they would have 9' ceilings, crown molding, a security system, cable, high-speed Internet, and perhaps a small community room. Mayor Davis commented on the need to have a meeting space large enough for the condo association to meet.

In response to a question from Mr. Roberts, Mr. Varga said they had not done a traffic study yet. Ms. Hruby said that would be an issue the City will need to look at regardless of how the property is used.

Mr. Putens asked about construction. The response was that it would be wood frame, with no concrete between floors. Mr. Putens said he thought that was short-sighted, given the market they wished to appeal to, because of fire and noise issues.

Covenant with the City

Mr. Haller said they had fully anticipated entering into an agreement with the City that would limit some of the exemptions requested in the text amendments, where the zoning text would go beyond what they wished to do.

Mayor Davis commented that this situation was different from those Council has objected to in the past where a text amendment was narrowly defined to benefit only a specific project. These changes would be county-wide.

It was agreed to hold another work session about this at 8:30 p.m. on September 22, following the Buddy Attick Park boundary walk. If agreement is reached, the goal is to have an item for Council approval on the September 27 agenda in order that the developer can go forward on the County Council agenda in the first half of October.

Other Business

Ms. Mach told Council that as a follow-up to last week's ACE meeting, Principal Conyers will request an SHA traffic study at the high school. Mayor Davis said Greenbriar is concerned about potential spillover parking issues from the high school and that people are already using the Greenbriar parking lots as a drop off point for students. Mr. Goldberg noted this could potentially be a problem at Windsor Green, too.

Mayor Davis said although staff had been assured by WMATA that no new construction was being undertaken at the Metro yard, she had been assured otherwise. She suggested perhaps the definition of "new" is the issue.

The Mayor also asked the City Manager to check into the current process for members of Council to apply to serve on committees for the National League of Cities.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Gallagher
City Clerk